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SUBJECT: LATIN AMERICA: 1999 VATICAN DOCUMENT STILL GIVES DIRECTION
TO POLICY

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SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Latin America is home to about half of the world's more than one billion-plus Catholics, making it a key region for the Holy See. It is also a region where the Catholic Church is losing many adherents, especially to evangelical groups. For these reasons and others, Latin America is often on the minds of Vatican officials. In our discussions with them, interlocutors refer again and again to "Ecclesia in America," the 1999 Holy See document that outlined the Church's concerns and its outlook on the region. Despite the document's age, it remains at the heart of the Holy See's perspective on the region and can serve as a helpful primer on the Church's Latin interests. The document has particular relevance in light of Pope Benedict's plans to address an important Latin American gathering in Brazil in 2007.

¶2. (U) This cable outlines several relevant portions of "Ecclesia," including sections on economic issues, globalization, corruption, drugs, migrants, women, and ecology; the document can be found in its entirety at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jpii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america_en.html. A subsequent cable will use "Ecclesia" as the backdrop for an examination of current views of the Church in Latin America as seen from the Vatican, and address issues such as the evangelical challenge in the region. End summary.

Document Addresses Key Concerns

¶3. (SBU) A synod (meeting) of the world's bishops on the

Catholic Church in the Americas (North, Central and South) in 1999 resulted in a key Holy See reference document for Latin America. Pope John Paul II promulgated "Ecclesia in America" (The Church in America), using the deliberations of the synod bishops as a basis for his exhortation to the Church in the Americas. The document moved beyond purely ecclesiastical themes to address social, economic and political issues specific to Latin America: human rights, the impact of globalization, urbanization, the external debt burden, corruption, the drug trade and the environment. Though the document is over seven years old, and there has been a change in pope since its promulgation, it remains the underpinning of the Holy See's policy in the region. Pope Benedict XVI has quoted it several times, and regional bishops' conferences pay similar attention to the document. As noted above, our interlocutors have often called our attention to the document. "Ecclesia in America" will be the starting point for Latin America's bishops when they come together at a special conference to be held in Brazil in May 2007. Pope Benedict XVI is scheduled to participate in the meeting that will gather together representatives from 22 bishops' conferences in the region representing half of the world's Catholics.

Economic Issues

14. (U) In the context of Latin America's legacy of liberation theology, a Marxist analysis of class struggle promoted by a significant number of Catholic clergy and lay people, the bishops were sure to emphasize economic issues when they drew up the 1999 document. "Ecclesia in America" criticized the poverty and underdevelopment in rural areas that has contributed to a

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growing unhealthy urbanization in Latin America. Rural areas, the bishops said, lack adequate utilities, transportation, and educational and health services. They lamented the lack of urban planning in many regions of Latin America - "in certain cases, some urban areas are like islands where violence, juvenile delinquency and an air of desperation flourish," they said. The synod bishops committed themselves to tackling the particular challenges of urban Latin America through education, health care and charity work.

15. (U) The bishops expressed solidarity with Latin American countries experiencing the burden of external debt repayments, and acknowledged at the same time that debt is often "the result of corruption and poor administration." The bishops charged that massive external debt was caused not only by high interest rates caused by "speculative financial policies," but also by government irresponsibility in repayment planning. The situation is aggravated by the frequency with which huge international loans enrich individuals rather than aid countries in need.

Globalization

16. (U) "Ecclesia in America" called globalization morally neutral, but warned that if it served simply to "suit the

powerful" it could only hurt humanity. In this context, the bishops warned against some possible results of globalization, including increased unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, a widening gap between rich and poor, and unfair competition that put poor nations at an increased disadvantage. Positive consequences of globalization on the other hand, included increased efficiency and production, and a greater unity between peoples as a result of the development of economic and communication links between countries.

Corruption

¶7. (U) Corruption was a key to many ills in Latin America, according to the bishops. They charged that it infected individuals, public institutions and the private power structures of the governing elite. Corruption, "Ecclesia" said, created a situation that encouraged a lack of trust in political institutions, especially in the administration of justice and public investments. The document said those in authority needed to denounce and combat corruption more forcefully. Supervisory bodies and transparency in economic and financial transactions could also help stop the spread of such corruption, the bishops said. They added that the effects of corruption seemed to weigh most heavily on the poor.

Drugs

¶8. (U) Synod bishops declared that the drug trade and drug use constituted a "grave threat" to Latin America's social fabric - contributing to crime and violence, the destruction of family life, and the physical and emotional destruction of individuals and communities. The bishops said the drug trade also ruined governments, eroding economic security and national stability.

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Women

¶9. (U) The situation of women in Latin America occupied a significant portion of the synod's deliberations. The bishops said that the role of women was "decisive" because of their contribution to the material and cultural development of the region, especially in education and health care. The bishops lamented the discrimination experienced by women in many part of Latin America. They said the face of the poor "is also the face of many women" and they committed themselves to denouncing sexual abuse and male domination as actions contrary to God's plan for humanity. The bishops stressed the need for women to take up leadership roles within Latin American society, but also affirmed traditional roles such as motherhood and full-time care

of the family.

Indigenous People and Migrants

¶10. (U) The synod bishops suggested a process of reconciliation for indigenous peoples and their "host" societies. The bishops asked that the North American churches adopt special programs to help Latin migrants to the United States and Canada to become integrated into their new societies. They warned against restrictions against the natural right of individuals to move freely within their own nations and between nations. They called for an increased respect for the human dignity of illegal immigrants.

Ecology

¶11. (U) "Ecclesia" paid particular attention to ecological issues in Latin America. They urged Catholics to work with legislative and government bodies to ensure effective protection of the environment, emphasizing the Catholic position on the "stewardship" of creation. The bishops complained of ecological "abuse and destruction" in Latin America, warning of the threat of desertification and air pollution. The Amazon rainforest posed particular concern for the bishops; they described the region as one of the world's most precious resources.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Benedict's May 2005 message to Latin American bishops for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) focused mainly on internal Church issues such as the promotion of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the importance of Catholic moral teaching on marriage and family life. The CELAM meeting itself was more politically and socially aware. At a press conference, the bishops - repeating concerns expressed in "Ecclesia in America" - lamented the "unjust distribution of wealth and the abysmal differences in the distribution of resources" in their region. They asked how this could happen when the majority of Latin

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America's presidents, business people and professionals claimed to be Catholics. The May 2007 CELAM general assembly will likely continue these more political themes and take up many of the subjects addressed in the 1999 document. Pope Benedict's attendance at the gathering is likely to draw him into the fray, prompting him to reinvigorate the spirit of "Ecclesia in America." We will report more on this in the coming months.
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